DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 288 792 SO 018 585

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TITLE Swedish Educational Reforms--Women's Life Stories--What Can They Tell about a Rational Reform Era?
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987). IOR project (Idea and reality underlying educational reforms of higher education; financed by HSFR/The Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences/ 1979-1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; Educational Planning; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; Life Satisfaction; Quality of Life; Quality of Working Life; *Womens Education; *Womens Studies
IDENTIFIERS Life Cycles; Life Transitions; *Sweden

ABSTRACT

The IOR project (Idea and reality underlying educational reforms of higher education) used women's life stories as case studies to help understand the reforms of higher education during an expansive, "rational" planning period. The project gathered data from 300 women who returned questionnaires. A central topic in the IOR-questionnaires was the so-called "life-line question" in which the women were asked to mark their education, working life, domestic work, childbirths, marriages, divorces and other important events in life on a time-line. This became an important starting-point for the third part of the study in which 30 women contributed their life-stories to the project. It was found that a conflict between productive and reproductive tasks dominated the life-stories of many women. Also, women's life patterns were similar in spite of different educational, social, and regional backgrounds. Most of the respondents had chosen typical "female professions," most of them worked part-time, only a few of them could be found in non-traditional female professions, and very few were in leadership positions. Education is viewed as a catalyst with a great potential for positive change. Women's life stories can provide a better understanding for educational planning and reform. (SM)

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SWEDISH EDUCATIONAL REFORMS - WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES - WHAT CAN THEY TELL ABOUT A RATIONAL REFORM ERA?

Inga Elgqvist-Saltzman

Paper delivered at AERA Symposium: International Perspectives on Women's Education, AERA Annual Meeting 1987, Washington

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SWEDISH EDUCATIONAL REFORMS - WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES - WHAT CAN THEY TELL ABOUT A RATIONAL REFORM ERA?

Inga Elgqvist-Saltzman

"It is a constant risk that the life that could make you a whole human being making use of your full potential, can be reversed, so that the too many different demands make you a disharmonious, divided person".

This is how Karin, a 38-year-old teacher from Central Sweden, ends her educational and professional story in May 1981, describing it to one of the members of the IOR-project.[1)]

The IOR-Project

The IOR-project tried to analyse how ideas about efficiency, equality and relevance in the reform work of higher education have been carried out in real life for some educational actors at various levels of the educational system.

To students who had finished upper secondary school during the educationally expansive years in the 50's and 60's the following questions were put in a series of case studies[2)]:

- Why did some students with good grades from secondary school not take advantage of the tertiary education offered in the region?
- Why did some dropout from their tertiary studies?
- How has higher education been used in a vocational career?

Since Karin has a university degree, it was the third question of how the education was used in professional life, that was focussed in her educational and professional story.

Paper delivered at AERA annual meeting April 1982, Washington USA

Before writing her life-story Karin had, like some 300 other women aged between 32 and 46 with different social and regional backgrounds, answered questions about their own, their parents´ and their grand-parents´ education and professional career as well as about their present family. A central topic in the IOR-questionnaires was the so-called "life-line question" in which the women were asked to mark their education, working life, domestic sork, childbirths, marriages, divorces and other important events in life on a time-line. This "life-line question" became an important starting-point for the third part of the study - the life-stories - in a slep-wise analytical model based on statistical analyses of three upper secondary school cohorts.[4)]

So far some 30 women have given us their life-stories. Why women? At first we chose women because we found that there was more knowledge available about how men make use of the educational system. The analyses soon showed that, besides specific knowledge about women´s attitudes towards education, we also obtained a good illustration of the complex interaction between education and society by studying women as they pass in and out between education, work and domestic work.

Owing to the development of a data base, on the basis of three student cohorts, individual life-stories can always be related to a regional, social and educational context. Figure 1 shows Karin´s place in the data base and which of the three questions and which of the reform goals were focussed in the case study in which she was included.

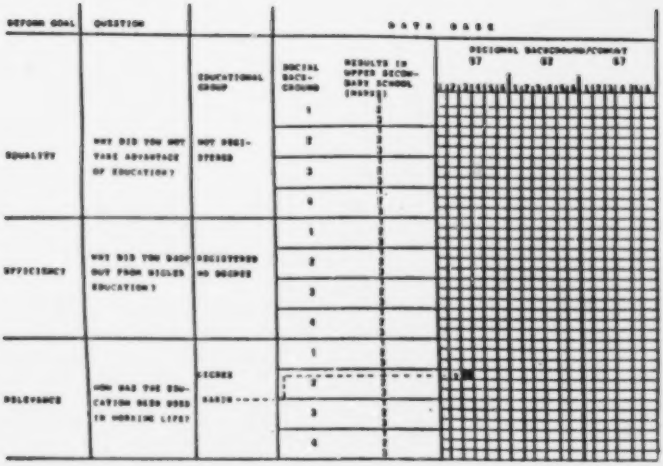

Figure 1. A life-story in the IOR-model

Let us now return to Karin´s story. She summarizes her life-story as follows:

"I have a rich and privileged life with a good and interesting education, a work where I can make the most of myself, an equal family and close contact with my child - but I have had to work hard and persistently to achieve this positive overall impression, as society does not give you this situation for nothing and there are many traps. I feel that since I had children I am constantly cruising between female emancipation and the demands of working life on me as a professional woman and the responsibility for home and family".

Like half of all professional Swedish womenKarin has solved the "cruising" between the various demands by working part-time. It is a positive choice.

"I am definitely not of the opinion that it is a waste of resources that I stay at home with my child part of the time even if I have a university degree. On the contrary. Why should small children not have the opportunity to be with resourceful people with a higher education and privileged jobs?"

Like most other women Karin discovers that while part-time work is good for the children and the family it is bad for the career. The professional situation changes.

"I have a lower status at my work now..." It is, according to Karin, a painful experience

"... to form part of a system maintaining inequality. The children are indoctrinated to regard their mothers as moderate workpower and society depreciates part-time workers; it is desirable to work full-time outside the home, especially for boys".

The focus in Karin's story is on the children's place in modern society, where both women and men have the right and opportunity to education and an interesting and privileged working life. Her own reaction as a professional woman making a career, "living for studies, work and social commitment", to the longed-for baby is described as follows:

"I have never quite managed to join the two halves I split into when my child was born. They are two separate lives. The reason is, I think, the way society is organized. Nothing interesting occurs in the domestic world, all interesting things happen in the professional life. And I had my ideals from my own childhood and adolescence and my mother's fine combination of the two worlds - but it is much more difficult today, when most people with my education and my interests simply cannot be found in day-time".

The basic principle, that "it shall be possible to combine, gainful employment and family life", formed during her childhood has been put to the test:

"The most bitter thing which I have never quite overcome, was that I felt that my colleagues let me down, that they refused to understand that the fact that a person has a child must be allowed to influence and change her. I have become aware of the children's situation in our society, they are neither seen nor heard but kept far away from everything important, and I have also gained a great understanding for all women. I now understand all kinds of choices women have made and I sense conflicts under the surface, whichever choice they may have made".

The conflict between productive and reproductive tasks also dominates other life-stories. Let us present some other glimpses of the results:

We found that the women's life patterns in the three cohorts were similar - in spite of different educational, social and regional backgrounds. Most of them had chosen typical "female professions", most of them worked part-time, only a few of them could be found in non-traditional female professions and very few in leading positions.

What was the women's attitudes towards education? Education was generally described as something positive with a great potential for change. Education seemed to have different functions in differents periods of life. After leaving upper secondary school most women were in a hurry to acquire an education giving them a foothold in professional life before marrying and having children. When the children were small the education was often supplemented so that it would be easier to adjust to the family situation. This often resulted in lowering the professional ambition. When the children were growing up the women tried to get an education leading to meaningful work, where they could also make use of their life experience.

We could see how values regarding education changed over a generation. The "social gap" that many working-class girls experienced in choosing a higher education after leaving upper secondary school was not observed when they discussed their daughters choices or their own future education. The stories also showed an increasing awareness of choices related to sex.

The "life-pattern" of various groups could be analyzed on the basis of the life-line question. Figure 2 illustrates the pattern in a "drop-out group". Half-time work starts before the education is finished. The amount of domestic and part-time work increases when the children are born. But when the children are growing up they continue to work part-time. And their studies cover their whole life-span. It was too easily to label the women in this substudy definite drop-outs, an impression which could be

given by statistical analyses.

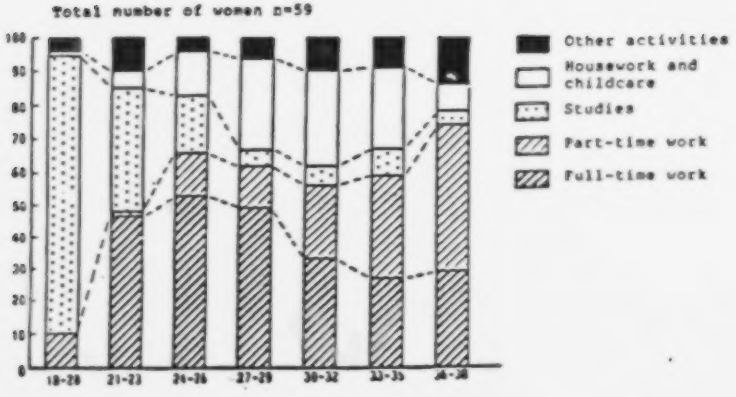

Figure 2. "The life-line", average employment, study and home activity of "the women aged 18-38 years in a "drop-out group". (Percentage figures). 3/

The life-line question could, by means of the computer, be adapted to graphs for various social, regional and age groups. The computer also provided possibilities to make comparisons over time with data from other projects.

A Historical "Peep-Hole"

The "Rostad-project" has studied the life patterns of female teachers before the reform period (1910-1950). Questionnaires and life-stories are being compiled for some cohorts graduating from a college for female teachers in southern Sweden in the 20's and 40's (Elgqvist-Saltzman 1985).

Figure 3 compares the professional activity in the form of full-time work for these cohorts with a group of female teachers from the IOR-project.

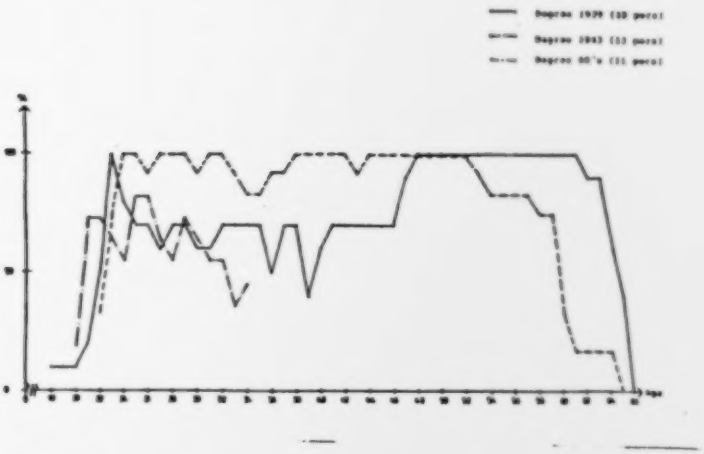

Figure 3. Full-time working female teachers in three groups graduating in the 20´s, 40´s and 60´s, respectively. (Percentage figures).

In the group graduating in the 20´s half of the teachers stayed at home after getting married, since it was considered unmoral during a period of unemployment that a married woman worked, thus "taking the bread from the mouth of those who were in greater need of it". Most of these women later returned to the profession, working full-time until they retired.

The cohort graduating in the 40´s represents a group of female teachers who have recently retired. An unbroken line for full-time work indicates that these women have been able to combine working life and family life. Our group graduating in the 60´s illustrates a modern pattern. The female teachers pass in and out and to and fro between working life, education and housework. Most of them work part-time.

A general outline of the life pattern of a female teacher graduating in the 20´s:

Figur 4. The "life-line" of a female teacher graduating in the 20´s

Cecilia had, besides teaching, political and social commitments. She had five children but always returned to work after some months´ time off. Her whole biography bears witness to a totally integrated professional role. (Dahllöf, T. 1986). Her life pattern differs considerably from that of a typical "female teacher graduating in the 60´s", whose professional life is characterized by part-time work and the interaction between education, working life, housework and very little social and political commitment.

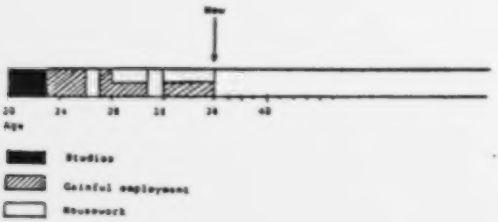

Figure 5. The "life-line" of a female teacher graduating in the 60´s

Why are these life-lines so different? The life-stories of these teachers give us a glimpse of different circumstances. The analyses of the life patterns of the female "teachers of the 20´s" indicate a whole-hearted concentration on a professional role and a successful integration of the professional role with other life roles. This was among other things facilitated by the fact that they had servants or maids who took care of the house and the children when they were working. It was in fact at least two women´s work behind their careers! The reality of the older female teachers was also, from a cultural point of view, more clear-cut. (Askling and Holm 1985).

The Rostad-study has served as a historical "peep-hole" for the IOR-project. Many of the "IOR-women" could also be found in some kind of educational activity. Let us once again return to Karin´s story and see how she describes the situation of the modern female teacher:

"But my profession is actually very badly adjusted to a parental and professional situation. To be a teacher can even be something of a vocation, it never ends. My level of ambition with my work is not lower than before (before the child was born). But I have chose this profession because it is so developing, gives you such fine social qualities and provides you with the possibility of making the most of yourself owing to the great freedom of action. I think there is an insoluble conflict between such demanding professions and children".

The older female teachers seldom talk about conflicts between professional life and family life in this way, which is characteristic of the "IOR-women". This can, of course, partly be due to the fact that they now find themselves in another life phase, that they have forgotten. But their memory is acute regarding other conflicts - e.g. the question whether a married female teacher should be allowed to work and regarding injustices in wages and positions compared with male teachers.

Apart from the fact that the life-line graphs have provided us with the possibility to study and discuss differences in the career and family patterns of various groups of women over time and space we can also make comparisons with demographic data at the macrolevel. Our material

shows that longer educations lead to child-births later in life and that a higher percentage of women with a university degree are childless. Our co-operation with demographers has showed us many interesting examples of interaction between education and family pattern, which should be of interest for educational planning.

Educational Reforms

In the IOR-project we have used women's life stories to relate people's realities to ideas underlying the reforms of higher education during an expansive, "rational" planning epoch. Karin's story has been used as an example. During her life-time many changes have been carried out at the various levels of the educational system. Figure 6 illustrates the intensity of the reform work.[5] This figure also includes Karin's "life-line" in order to illustrate the simultaneousness.

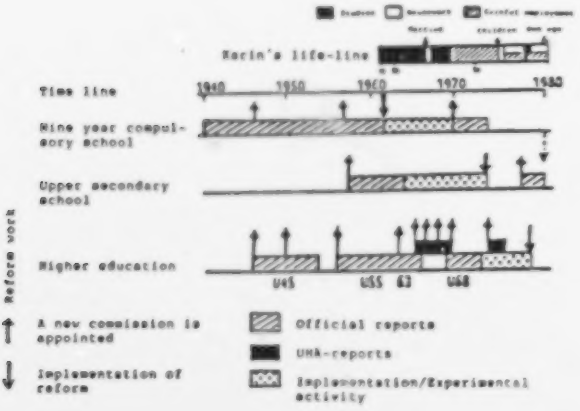

Figure 6. Karin's life-line in relation to reforms of nine-year compulsory school, upper secondary school and higher education 1940-1980

Karin has benefited by part of this reform work. However, the great reform of higher education occurred after she had finished her education. It is more interesting to study the overlapping goals and ideas underlying the whole reform process than to study individual reforms and their effects.

Which were the overlapping goals of the intensive reform process that in 40 years transformed the whole Swedish educational system to a uniform system, thus exciting both admiration as well as criticism from international researchers? Great pains have been taken to eliminate hindrances and obstacles for all citizens, irrespective of origin, sex and ethnical group, to be able to be trained in a profession providing both their maintenance as well as a meaningful life.

Equality has been an overlapping goal. There is even a special word for equality between man and woman in Sweden, "jämställdhet". Efficiency has been very important in the reform work of higher education. It was important that the throughput to the labour market was frictionless. Great importance was attached to the needs of the potential employers and relevance in an organization of higher education that was divided into vocational sectors.

Analyses of the goals underlying the reform work have inspired us to try to compare the structure underlying "rational" educational planning with the structure dictating women´s educational choices and behaviours. In a very rough outline the following pattern can be traced:

	Rational educational planning	women´s reality
Education =	plain sailing	winding roads
Choice of education =	individual choices	"relation choices", i.e. in relation to people in the background environment and surrounding group
Women´s choice of education	irrational	rational, when other life roles are made visible
Relevance =	in relation to profession and labour market	in relation to various life phases - various life roles

In her story Karin uses strong words about "a system maintaining inequality", where primarily women and children get jammed. She speaks of a "lacking overall view" of people, especially of men but also of women. She points to the inequal use of human competence and how, especially, the children suffer by this. Her story underlines the differences in values and structures within working life and unpaid child-care. "The child opened my eyes to other values", says Karin.

Our results, not least the case study of which Karin formed past, made us ask the following question:

Have these reforms been so strongly concentrated on adjusting the education to the productive work that other life roles have been overlooked? Can that explain why so many of the women we asked had difficulties in using the courses offered by our educational reforms to the full? If we look at the situation today we observe that there is a strongly increasing number of women in higher education. General statistics show that, today more women than men are registered in higher education. If these total figures are not supplemented with the analysis of the distribution over study programmes and levels, drop-outs and what happens after the education, they are very liable to lead to the wrong

conclusions (Svensson 1986, Elgqvist-Saltzman 1986).

In spite of all that has been done the statistics still report a very biased distribution according to sex. Men still dominate within technology and women within nursing. In a society where pollution, nuclear power and nuclear arms are topics of debate, it would be natural to analyze the consequences of the distribution of various types of students for various study programmes. If one wants to get at the problems of equality in a deeper sense, the statistical data must be supplemented with qualitative analyses of both educational policy as well as of people's reality. A renewal of analysis models and theory approaches is necessary!

Research on Education

In Sweden the investigation work on the many educational reforms has, more than in any other country, been linked up with research. Especially educational researchers have been engaged in this work. In times of expansion and development it was easy to adopt a "from-above-perspective". In the age of evaluation when it appeared that the planned goals were not so easy to carry out new models are wanted, models also being able to point to hidden effects and the complexity of the situation.

After having been almost completely forgotten during the decades when "the psychometric conception of the world" dominated the research within the social sciences, qualitative methods from the childhood of sociology and educational research, for example biographical methods (Bertaux 1981, Bogdan & Biklen 1982), have come into favour again.

This article has tried to show how a Swedish project has worked with women's life-lines and life-stories in studies of educational planning. The results have inspired us to continue our work. The HEKLA-project[6], which is a Nordic joint project, will try to analyze how educational reforms, especially within higher education in the Nordic countries, have influenced women's lives and work. Some 15 researchers from various disciplines in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland cooperate in a number of projects

regarding educational policy and the behaviour of girls and women at various levels of the educational system.

All these projects share the so-called "livslopp-perspektivet". The method used in the description above has to a great extent been inspired by Norwegian research on women and education (Skrede and Tornes 1983). Women´s "combination strategies" (Tornes 1984) are a central theme in these projects.

Theories, passing behind behavioural patterns to deeper structures of thought, are required in order to be able to understand what happens in education and especially how women make use of education. Central models during the analyses of Karin´s and other IOR-women´s situations, were Norwegian theories of various forms of rationality within various sectors of the labour market, especially Hildur Ve´s (1983) work to transfer these theories to the educational field. (Sørensen 1984, Waerness 1984). An important aim of the HEKLA-project is a further development of this model.

In our various Nordic projects, affecting both the policy level as well as women´s careers and girls´ education in the classroom, we thus ask the following questions:

The policy level: Has the reform work been dominated by a technical, limited rationality, the ultimate goal of which is efficiency, treating people as goals?

Are women´s educational and career patterns governed by another form of rationality, rationality of care? Are boys and girls at an early stage socialized to various forms of rationality? Is the girls´ earlier biological maturity used to maintain order in the classroom, i.e. is the rationality of care used to achieve efficiency in school, i.e. a technical, limited rationality?

We believe that women´s life-stories, as described above in the IOR-project, can help us get a better knowledge of the plain sailing of educational planning and the winding roads of women. Our analyses so far indicate the lack of a social dimension[7] in the rational planning period. With the help of our women´s life-stories we may come a bit closer to a better understanding of the underlying structures of various forms of rational actions within the educational planning.

Notes

1) Idea and reality underlying educational reforms of higher education. The project was financed by HSFR/The Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences/ 1979--1983

2) The case studies have been reported in essays and papers within the IOR-project. Department of Education, Umeå. See also Elgqvist-Saltzman, I, Eriksson, G-M & Kim, L, 1983, Andersson, I, & Elgqvist-Saltzman, I, 1984 and Elgqvist-Saltzman, I, 1985 b

3) Source: Carlsson, V-A & Hjelm-Ström, A, 1984

4) The extraordinarily good supply of educational statistics, which was built up as a part of the follow-up of the reforms, made it possible to identify graduates, dropouts and non-enrolling students from three cohorts (1957, 1962, 1967) leaving secondary school during the expansion period. A database was built up which contained information concerning socioeconomic background (interms of father´s and mother´s occupation at the time the student left secondary education), average grade in the final year of secondary school and educational achievement in higher education for students from 6 regions.

5) The Swedish educational system has been the object of continuous reform, which has transformed all levels of education into a very unitary system. As Fig. 6 shows, there has been substantial reform activity in Sweden during the last 40 years. Implementation of the nine-year comprehensive school occurred in 1962, a new upper-secondary school was introduced in 1971, and a quite new organization of higher education in 1977. The U68 reform, as it was usually called after the year the commission started to work, can be described as the latest step in a long reform process. (It should be mentioned that this process also included adult education laws; 1967 and 1971, and preschool education for all from 1975).

6) The HEKLA-project (The Effects of Reforms in Higher Education on Women's Lives and Work) is financed by NOS-S/The Joint Committee of the Nordic Social Sciences Research Council/ from July 1st, 1986.

7) Pusey (1976), Elgqvist-Saltzman (1976)

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